

India's demand for Freedom !



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I. India and the War

"If the war is to defend the status quo, imperialist possessions, colonies, vested interests and privileges, then India can have nothing to do with it. If, however, the issue is democracy and a new world order based on democracy, then India is intensely interested in it." (Statement of the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress, issued on the outbreak of war.)

With these words the Indian National Congress, which represents the vast majority of India's 30 million voters, has defined its attitude to the present war. Once again it has advanced its demand for Indian independence and for the democratic right of the Indian people to frame their own constitution without external interference.

For Indians the reply of the British Government is a test of British sincerity. The Indian people are asking if this is a war for democracy—or a war for imperialist ends.

But not only Indians are interested. This is our problem too, and our challenge. All over the world, in America and in other neutral countries, those who view this war objectively will regard the attitude of Britain to the Indian claim as one of the fundamental tests of the British cause.

Above all this is a challenge to British democrats and socialists and to all those of us who condemn war which is fought for imperialist ends, and who have always condemned the exploitation of one people by another.

Is the Congress claim extravagant? Does it really represent the will of the Indian people? Is the British Government, in actual fact, doing all that is possible to grant India a fuller and more real democracy? These questions we must answer. But to do so we must study more closely the background to the claims of the Indian people, a background of exploitation, a story of poverty and repression told in terms of 350 million lives.

It is hypocrisy to talk of fighting for a just and democratic world when we refuse to work with the Indian people for the achievement of democracy in India. We have passed beyond the stage when we regard the coloured peoples as subhumans, with a right only to sub-human conditions of existence. We condemn the notion of a "Jekyll and Hyde" democracy which assumes the role of oppressor as soon as it is out of sight beyond the Indian Ocean.

To-day the Indian people present us with a straightforward question. We must give them the straightforward and rational answer which the prejudice of former generations obscured and refused.

Is this war being fought for imperialist domination? Or is it a war to end aggression of every kind, and to build a new world order based on democracy and justice?
INDIA IS THE TEST.

II. The Present Deadlock

"India wants to forget the past of conflict, and stretch out her hand in comradeship. But she can do so only as a free nation on terms of equality." (Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, in "News Chronicle," October 9, 1939)

The Indian people to-day are putting forward no new and extravagant demands. They are trying neither to embarrass Britain, nor to exploit the present situation in order to strike a hard bargain. Still less is there the slightest desire in India to help Fascism or to assist active aggression of any kind. No one who has followed the history of the struggle of the Indian people can doubt the strength of their democratic ideals, or the deep conviction in their minds that the peoples of the world have common cause against both Fascism and Imperialism.

"It is asserted," says the statement of the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress, "that democracy is in danger and must be defended, and with this statement the Committee are in complete agreement. The Committee believe that the peoples of the West are moved by this ideal and objective and for these they are prepared to make sacrifices. But again and again the ideals and sentiments of the people and of those who have sacrificed themselves in the struggle have been ignored and faith has not been kept with them."

The Indian National Congress claims nothing new to-day. But it does demand, in answer to its claims, something more than an empty promise.

India's "National Demand"

For those who have cared to listen to the authentic voice of India, expressed by its majority political party, the present situation holds no surprises. Year after year, at its annual sessions, the Indian National Congress has reiterated its attitude to Fascism, to War, to the Federal constitution and to the National Demand for Independence. **It is our fault if we have failed, in peace time, to listen to that voice, only to have it forced on us in time of war.**

The attitude of the Indian National Congress on these four major points has been quite clear. It can be summed up as follows:

1. Hatred of Fascism as an intensification of the principles of Imperialism against which the Indian people have struggled for many years.
2. No outside authority has the right to decide for the Indian

people the issue of war or peace, nor can the Indian people permit their resources to be exploited for imperialist ends.

3. Congress refuses to accept the anti-democratic Federal Constitution and demands that India should frame her own constitution, through a Constituent Assembly based on universal adult suffrage.
4. The demand for complete independence from political and economic control.

Indian Opinion Flouted

The British Government has treated these fundamental demands with contemptuous disdain. Naturally the people of India have resented this. They have a right to resent it. For the Congress Party is no longer an illegal organisation whose membership spends its time in and out of prison. In all but two of the eleven provinces, at the last elections in 1937, the Congress received more votes than any other party. In eight provinces it was able to form a Government. (See p. 25.)

With the outbreak of war came the most far-reaching and the most arbitrary measure of all. **Without any consultation whatsoever, India was declared a belligerent in the Second World War**, not asked but *told* to contribute to the misery and sacrifice which that involves.

Then it became obvious to the Indian people that their country was to be used as a pawn in an imperialist game.

If further proof of this was needed, two other Imperial measures supplied it:

1. The amendment in Westminster of the Indian Constitution in order to place still more executive control in the governor's hands.
2. The issue of the Emergency Powers Act, restricting still further the rights of the press and of discussion of public affairs, forbidding anti-war propaganda and meetings, and giving the bureaucracy wide powers of arrest and detention.

Far from the Indian people taking advantage of the war to embarrass Britain, it is the British Government which has seized this opportunity to tighten the bonds of imperialism over India.

The Congress Party, on the other hand, simply reiterates the policy evolved over a number of years. It could not have kept silence without abandoning its whole political programme and abusing the faith of the millions whom it represents. Its statement of September 14 is an historic document, historic, not for its novelty, but for its simplicity and honesty. There is in it no opportunism, no attempt to bargain.

"We are against Fascism and aggression," it says, in effect. "We are for democracy and a new world order. But we are also

against imperialism, and we have no reason to trust the unsupported word of those who betrayed us in the last war and have betrayed democracy all over the world since then. Give us proof of Britain's faith in democracy by granting independence to India, and we shall be at one with the British people in building a new world order. But we will not fight an imperialist war for imperialist ends."

The Viceroy's Reply to India

That reply was, in brief, as follows :

1. That British war aims cannot yet be more clearly defined than as "a war to make aggression impossible."
2. That Britain, as in 1917 and 1929, reaffirms her pledge to grant India Dominion Status in due course.
3. That another Round Table Conference will be called after the war to discuss constitutional amendments to the Federal Constitution of 1935.
4. That for the present the Viceroy will appoint a consultative committee of all parties, interests and creeds, with the object of associating Indian public opinion with the conduct of the war.

Reaction in India to this declaration was immediate and almost unanimous. In the words of Mr. Gandhi : " Congress, in asking for bread is given a stone. The Viceroy's statement simply shows that the old policy of divide and rule is to continue. . . The declaration shows clearly that there will be no democracy for India if Britain can prevent it."

Although the Muslim League has not yet made its position completely clear, an important Muslim point of view was expressed by Mr. Abdur Rahman Siddiqui, who is a member of the Muslim League Executive Committee.

"There could be no more meaningless political utterance than the Viceroy's statement," he said, "in regard to the freedom of India, for which the Congress and the Muslim League stand."

Said Mr. Malik Barkat Ali, another member of that Committee : "The Viceroy's statement is nothing but a dead sea-fruit."

In the Viceroy's statement there is no single attempt to break from the past of British Imperialism. The Congress is lectured as a naughty child. Its demands are not considered.

The proposal for a Constituent Assembly to frame India's constitution is ignored. Instead, the traditional British bait is thrown to the Indian people—conferences and committees; these to be selected, of course, not by the Indian people, but from the Viceroy's nominees, however unrepresentative.

There is no more likelihood that these hand-picked committees will reach a satisfactory conclusion than there ever has been in the

past. Certainly they cannot and will not speak for the masses of India.

The people of India asked for a say in their own future. They are offered some mock representatives to say it for them. They asked for independence. They are offered Dominion status "in due course." They asked for democracy. They are given the Emergency Powers Act. They asked for action as well as words. They are given—a dead sea-fruit.

Congress Fights Back

Faced with this complete rejection of their demands, the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress has ordered its Ministries to resign as an expression of India's resentment at this high-handed Imperialist treatment. The Working Committee has called on the Indian people to stand firm and united. It has set up war committees. The immense power of the Congress, the power of the millions in India who look to it for leadership, may soon be mobilised in a civil disobedience campaign in defence of Indian rights. That question rests with the leaders of the Congress.

III. Divide and Rule

"The minorities of India must have found out that Britain has only one use for them, namely, an excuse for parting with as little as possible." (Mr. Abdul Quaiyum Member of the Legislative Assembly. Non-Congress Muslim.)

The Viceroy in his reply to the Congress made much play with the existence in India of minorities and special interests. Like other British statesmen before him, he suggests that the existence of these minorities is a conclusive objection to Indian independence and democracy.

Who and What are the Minorities ?

The average man, when he hears the word "minority" in connection with India, thinks of religious minorities and castes. It is to these minorities that apologists for British imperialism call attention, for they are useful. But the important minorities are those of class and vested interest.

The Princes

First and foremost of these are the Princes. (We shall return to them later when we deal with the extent and strength of the popular movement in India.) They rule over nearly one quarter of the people of India. Their rule is autocratic and feudal; they refuse to introduce into their territories any democratic rights or institutions; their Privy Purse or Palace Expenditure is uncontrolled and

amounts—as in the case of Bikanir—to as much as 32 per cent of the state revenue.

Not unnaturally such rulers are bitterly opposed to the ideology of Congress. They hate and fear the strongly democratic and popular nature of the demands which the Congress makes for the remedy of the people's grievances. They are the biggest minority and the most powerful in their opposition to majority rule. The Viceroy listens attentively to their claims and maintains them in power by force of British arms.

You will have seen press photographs of the Aga Khan leading his expensive horses around Newmarket and Ascot. He is a well developed and greatly respected "minority."

The Landlords

The landlords form another special interest with specially reserved seats in all the Assemblies. In order to preserve their influential position in Indian politics they have already had occasion to appeal to the Viceroy for protection against legislation which affected their power to exploit their tenants.

The Congress has a radical agrarian policy which includes an all-round reduction of peasant rents and a change in the landlord system. The landlords, therefore, oppose the Congress and fear that in a democratically elected legislature their rights, as a privileged minority, to exploit the majority would be restricted.

The Chambers of Commerce

The Chambers of Commerce are associations of business men for the protection of their interests. They, too, are specially represented in the Assemblies. They are a still more powerful minority than the landlords because of their close connection with financiers in Britain.

In recent years their business of making profits has been considerably threatened by the growing movement of the workers, demanding better wages and living conditions. They want to keep the Indian worker in his present condition, and they therefore refuse to recognise his right to organise independent Trade Unions.

The Congress not only recognises this right but is pledged to improve all working-class conditions.

Those who are represented in the Indian and European Chambers of Commerce do not, therefore, look with any relish to the prospect of a free India. For in a free India the common people will have a say in what is to be done. So the British business man and his Indian colleague form yet another minority, to be protected, at all costs, by the full force of British Imperialism against the oppressive rule of the majority of the people.

Religious Minorities

In India there are, of course, innumerable castes, sects and religious groups. They present no insuperable problem. No one in India doubts that it is possible, if not easy, to provide their interests with adequate protection without denying to the Indian people a system of government in which the democratically-elected majority shall rule.

Muslims

Much the most important religious minority in India are the Muslims, numbering some 90 millions altogether. In three provinces, Bengal, North-West Frontier Province and the Punjab, they are actually in a majority.

They have come much later into the field of education and business, and consequently find themselves at a distinct economic disadvantage both in the securing of posts in government service and in the limited field of industry open to Indians. Fundamentally it is this economic disadvantage which is the root of all Hindu-Muslim antagonism, though it takes the outward form, often under the provocation of interested parties, of religious discord.

The main Muslim organisation is the Muslim League. Its general attitude is one of opposition to British imperialism, mixed with anxiety not to be subjected to a Congress majority. The reasons given are that Muslims have been oppressed in the Congress Provinces, though no proof of any instances of this allegation has been given.

But whilst the Muslim League is influential, especially among the middle and upper classes, it is by no means the only organisation to which Muslims belong. In the North-West Frontier Province, where the Muslims are in a majority, they support the Congress and formed a Congress Ministry. In other Provinces an increasing number of Muslims are joining the Congress, while some of their own communal organisations have more in common with the Congress than with the League—for instance, the Jamiat-Ul-Ulema and the Ahrars.

At any rate, in Trades Unions and Peasant organisations, both Hindus and Muslims work together, and find that their common class aims are of more importance than their alleged religious differences. This, of course, does not prevent employers from playing off one community against another, or from attempting, by the introduction of workers of one community as blacklegs, to turn a strike into a religious riot.

In more than one Province the Muslim League representatives in the Assembly actually voted for the motion on which the Congress Ministries condemned the Viceroy's Statement. This shows

that there is a good deal more unity between the communities on the question of India's independence than the Viceroy is willing to admit.

The conclusions to be drawn from these facts are :

1. That a "communal problem" does exist.
2. That it is fundamentally an economic problem.
3. But that British Imperialism will try, to the last, to play off one community against the other in an attempt to check the unification of the country.

Indian opinion admits the existence of a communal problem in these terms. But they argue that there is only one solution : that Indians themselves, Hindu and Muslim, must solve this problem democratically; and that so long as another power, standing above, playing off one group against the other, magnifying and exploiting every difference and discord, is able to dispense the loaves and fishes, so long will unification of the Indian people be impossible.

For generations British officials in India have laid great emphasis upon the necessity of protecting the interests of this or that minority. This has obscured the real problem of India. The real problem of India is how to tackle the immense poverty of the people, how to break down the old feudal relations that still exist, and how to provide the people with education and a fuller and healthier life.

Under British rule the common people of India have been reduced to almost unbelievable depths of poverty. In their struggle to better these conditions they have met with every kind of difficulty, but every day it is becoming clearer that their voice must be heard.

What is important for the future of India, therefore, is what these people, not the Princes and landlords, are thinking. What are the conditions in which the workers and peasants of India live, and is it to the Viceroy or to the Congress that they look for the remedy of their grievances?

IV. The Indian Worker

"I must tell you frankly that a radical change in your conditions is impossible without the attainment of national independence. It is therefore desirable that you take a living part in the struggle for independence that is going on in India now. For it is only through the influence you are able to bring to bear in this great fight that you can give a shape to the nation's political aspirations along the lines of social justice." (Address by the President of All-India Trades Union Congress.)

The vast majority of the Indian people have no vote. But they have very definite and urgent demands.

The workers and peasants are organised in Trade Unions without any caste or communal distinctions. Their fight is a clear-cut and simple one—to break down the restrictions that bind them to intolerable conditions of life.

The Conditions of the Working Class

Social services in India are virtually non-existent. Mr. Harold Butler, Director of the International Labour Office, issued a statement on January 8, 1935, when he left Bombay after a brief tour of India. He said :

“There is no limitation of hours in shops, in docks or in buildings. Even the health, safety and child labour provisions of the Factory Act do not apply in the vast number of workshops or in factories employing less than 20 persons, except by notification in one or two provinces. Those that I have seen have been almost uniformly insanitary and unhealthy.”

And that is after 180 years of British rule. These are the conditions from which British investors draw their dividends.

Wages

Under British rule the provision of social services and the protection of the workers have been persistently neglected.

The following are official figures for average wages in different parts of India :

Tea Plantations	Men	6d. to 8d. a day.
	Women	4d. to 6d. a day.
	Children	2 ½ d. to 3d. a day.
Coal Mining	Men	9d. to 1 ⅓ a day.
	Women	3d. to 5d. a day.
Jute Mills	Both	9d. to 1 ⅙ a day.
Textiles	Men	4d. to 2 ½ a day.
	Women	10d. a day.
	Children	3 ¾ d. a day.

These figures speak for themselves.

Hours

The existing Factory Act, which only applies to the larger factories and is, in any case, widely disregarded, limits hours to a 54-hour week.

According to the Chief Inspector of Factories, though in theory additional shifts are supposed to be manned by different workers, the same labour is often employed. The Act only requires, in such cases, that a “new shift be formed,” and *the Courts have refused to convict employers for re-forming shifts from workers who have already worked the legal maximum hours.*

Child Labour

In cigarette factories . . . "it is the general practice for children to begin work at five or six years of age, and to work without a weekly rest-day for 10 to 12 hours a day on a wage of about two annas a day (3d.). Many of the parents of these child workers are in debt to their employers and pledge their labour as a method of repayment of the loans." ("Industrial Worker in India" by Shiva Rao.)

Housing

In Bombay 244,121 workers live in rooms occupied by six to nine persons, 80,133 in rooms occupied by 10 to 19 persons, and 15,490 in rooms occupied by over 20 persons.

74 per cent of the workers live in one-room tenements.

95 per cent of the workers live in rooms condemned as unfit for human habitation.

Health

Tuberculosis is the scourge of the industrial workers, just as malaria ravages the rural population. The death rate of children in the jute mill area of Calcutta is 282 per 1,000. In the whole of India there are not more than 600 maternity and child-welfare centres.

Victimisation

The Indian worker may not be very well organised, but he is intensely loyal to his fellow workers and his leaders. In almost every big strike in India of recent years the chief immediate cause has been the victimisation of militant workers by the employers.

There is plenty of victimisation. The employers refuse to recognise the workers' unions. In the long drawn-out Cawnpore Textile Strike and in the Digboi strike, in which unarmed workers were shot down by police and military reserves, the employers consistently refused to accept the advice of the Congress Government to recognise the workers' unions. Instead, they dismissed all those workers who took any active part in organisation.

The Workers' Struggle for Trade Unions

The Trade Union movement in India did not take shape till 1918. The following years were marked by an epidemic of strikes for better conditions. The first session of the All-India Trades Union Congress was held in Bombay in 1920. Sixty Unions were affiliated.

In 1922 the 60-hour week was won after a series of strikes involving half a million workers. Then for five years there was a period of comparative industrial peace.

Between 1928 and 1930, however, India witnessed the most important struggles in the history of her working class. During 1928 no less than 31,647,404 working days were lost through strikes. There were strikes in the Tata Iron and Steel works at Jamshedpur, strikes on the East Indian railway, on the South Indian railway, in the Bengal jute mills, among the Calcutta scavengers, etc. Most important of all was the heroic struggle of the Bombay cotton workers. This terrific struggle started in April 1928 and lasted for six months, involving 150,000 workers.

The British Government tried to break the spirit of the workers by every possible method. Police and troops were used against the strikers; shootings, floggings and lathi charges were a common occurrence, and whole train-loads of blacklegs were imported into the strike areas.

When these tactics proved utterly ineffective, the Government arrested all the most prominent members of the trade union and working-class movement, and threw them into jail in Meerut, a small town in the United Provinces, nearly 1,000 miles from Bombay and Calcutta where the arrests had taken place. Among those arrested were practically all the executives of the Unions. The prisoners were accused of conspiracy against the King, and the trial dragged on for nearly four years.

The great struggles of 1928-9, though they ended in a temporary set-back for the workers, the imprisonment of all the leaders and the application of drastic emergency powers, helped to develop the Trade Union movement. At the Nagpur session of the All-India T.U.C. in 1929, 188,436 organised workers were represented.

Working-Class Unity

It was not until 1938 that complete unity of the Trade Union movement was established.

The years 1937 and 1938 witnessed a renewed period of intense working-class activity. In Bombay, Calcutta, Cawnpore, Allahabad and in a hundred other small industrial centres, the workers came into action demanding their rights. Their new unity, the release of their leaders from prison by the Congress Governments, and their expectation that the Congress would support their struggle against the employers, lent them a new confidence in their own strength.

Although to-day still only 300,000 workers are organised, yet in 1938 647,000 workers took part in 400 strikes, the highest number that had ever done so in a single year. This represents the reaction

of the Indian workers to the unbearable conditions of life to which Imperialism subjects them.

These struggles have been led in the main by young socialists of both working class and intellectual origin. The two socialist organisations in India are the Communist Party of India and the Congress Socialist Party. The Communist Party, formed in 1928, was declared illegal in 1934. It still has a considerable following in the main industrial centres, where the working-class movement is an important independent political factor in the life of the country. It has much influence on the policy of the Congress, of which many Communists are prominent members.

The Congress Socialist Party, formed in 1934, grew out of the Left Wing of the Congress and has, since its formation, worked very closely with the Communist Party. In addition to their work in developing the working-class movement, the two socialist parties have contributed a great deal to the building of the peasant and student movement.

Congress and the Workers

The Congress election manifesto proclaimed that Congress policy was to secure for the workers a living wage, healthy conditions of work, shorter hours, old age and sickness benefit and unemployment insurance. In addition women and children were to be specially protected from exploitation, and the right of workers to organise themselves in Trade Unions was recognised.

In the 1937 elections there was an electoral pact between the Trade Unions and the Congress, and the majority of the Trade Union leaders have consistently supported the Congress. In fact, many Trade Union leaders are also important provincial officials of the Congress, and more and more the workers' leaders are becoming recognised as among the best congressmen.

Unity of the Congress and the working-class organisations is still, it is true, incomplete. There have been occasions for criticism and recrimination on both sides. But the fundamental coincidence of their immediate struggle is shown, for instance, by the support given by the local congress in Cawnpore to the workers in the general textile strike and the formation of joint committees of workers and congressmen.

In the building up of their organisations, and the conduct of their strikes for better economic conditions, the workers have come to see with increasing clearness that their struggle is not only an economic one but also political. Their immediate demands are unobtainable so long as the final political power rests with the British Government, which actively strengthens and supports the resistance of their employers to those demands.

V. The Indian Peasant

"Everything is against him. Because he is a cultivator, he must borrow to secure his crop. Because his holding is small and has to support more persons than it can feed, he must increase his borrowing to keep those persons alive while the crop is on the ground. . . . As the debt grows, the repayment of it becomes more difficult—until at last some calamity comes upon him, repayment becomes impossible, and he sinks into a state of chronic indebtedness from which death alone can release him."

(M. L. Darling, Indian Civil Service.)

The British spent the nineteenth century in destroying Indian handicrafts in order to replace them with Lancashire and Birmingham goods. In doing so they drove millions on to the land and created immense problems of rural overcrowding. In 1891, 61 per cent of the population was engaged in agriculture. To-day the proportion is 70 per cent.

Having thus overcrowded the land, British Imperialism in the twentieth century is busily engaged, by taxing the people in the interests of British investors, in squeezing the peasantry off their holdings. Thus between 1921 and 1931 (that is before the full effect of the economic crisis was revealed) about 10 million peasants joined the ranks of the landless. **To-day, probably almost one-half of the agricultural population is landless.**

But while the landless population is swelling to these enormous proportions, the industrial development of India is being kept so strictly in check by the magnates of British finance capital that, in 1936, there were only 1,650,000 workers in the whole of India employed in factories to which the Factory Act applied. Making the most generous allowance, it is impossible to say that more than three or four million workers are engaged in large scale industry.

Those peasants who are thrown off the land are therefore forced to work as labourers for the miserable wage of 3d. or 4d. a day. Or very often they are given an acre of land by the landlord with the obligation of delivering back to him half of the crop, after themselves supplying all the costs of cultivation.

Debt

The total indebtedness of the people of India was reckoned in 1929 to be £800 million. To-day it is admitted to be at least £1,200 million. The peasant is forced into debt by his inability to pay his rent and taxes or to feed and clothe his family. But, having fallen into debt, though he may find the money-lender entirely accommodating, he is forced to pay interest on the loan at the rate of anything up to 300 per cent per annum!

An Indian Peasant Budget

It is possible to frame an approximate budget for the average peasant which shows how hopeless is his economic condition. The figures taken refer to Bengal.

Income		Expenditure		£	s.	d.
Average value of crop on		Taxes	...		3	0
2½ acres		Rent	...	1	7	0
		Debt Interest	...	2	10	0
		Cost of Cultivation		3	10	0
				<hr/>		
				£10	7	10 0

Thus the cultivator is left with £2 10s. with which to feed and clothe himself and his family throughout the year—not to speak of any feudal levy that his landlord may extort, or any social celebration that custom may impose on him.

No doubt many cultivators are more prosperous than the average; but it is equally certain that many have to pay as much as 40 per cent of the value of their crop by way of rent.

So intense is the pressure upon the peasant, and so many the demands upon him, that in many districts of India the average size of holdings has been reduced to little more than one acre. It is only necessary for the crop to fail and famine conditions will appear. In many parts of India, in fact, famine conditions are present every year.

Peasant Organisations

The world economic depression intensified for the peasant the burden of his debts and rents. In 1931 the prices of agrarian products were below the level of 1873.

A no-tax campaign, encouraged by the Congress leaders, spread throughout many areas. In December, 1930, in Berar, the peasants revolted against the landlords and money-lenders, destroying crops and property valued at over £40,000. In the United Provinces a no-rent campaign was led by Congress, and in December, 1931, over 100,000 peasants took a no-rent pledge.

But with the development and co-ordination of peasant struggles, their protest is no longer confined to sporadic outbursts of anger (though these still occur and to deal with them the landlords keep hired gangs of armed retainers).

The peasants, like the workers with whom they maintain the closest contact, realise the necessity of unity and organisation. Their Peasant Unions, springing up spontaneously in different districts and provinces, are now brought together in the *All-India Kisan Sabha* (Peasant Unions), with a membership of nearly a million.

The organised demonstrations, hunger marches, no-rent campaigns and resistance to evictions, have now definitely established

the Peasants Union as an independent and powerful organisation. At the same time this organisation is closely linked with the Congress, and, as in the case of the Trade Unions, the majority of the peasant leaders are also congressmen.

There are, of course, occasions on which the Congress has come into conflict with the organised peasant movement; for example, in Bihar, where the peasants are most strongly organised, the Congress Ministry was accused of being influenced by the powerful landlords to emasculate the proposed Tenancy Laws.

But these incidental conflicts are important mainly because they show the growing power of the people within the Congress and their consciousness of their right to criticise and demand satisfaction.

The official programme of the Congress for the peasantry included—recognition of peasant unions, relief of indebtedness, abolition of feudal services and levies, substantial reduction of rent, provision of social and cultural amenities in the villages, and drastic action to prevent the oppression of the peasantry by local officials.

VI. The Indian States

<i>Expenditure on Education</i>	...	1.2	per cent of total revenue
<i>Health Services</i>	1.5	"	" " " "
<i>Palace Expenses</i>	32.6	"	" " " "

—From the Bikanir State Budget

"Firing on inoffensive human beings, resulting in death and serious injury, has now become a normal occurrence in some of the Indian States." (Pandit Nehru.)

80 million Indian people are the subjects of the Indian Princes, some of whom—like the Maharajahs of Kashmir, Hyderabad and Mysore—rule over areas the size of Great Britain, while others hold royal sway over a few square miles.

But these Maharajahs and Nawabs are not independent rulers who control their own destinies and the destinies of their subjects. They are puppets. The real control is in the hands of the British Agent who is appointed by the Viceroy to act as the link between him and the Prince. He exercises this control, which includes supervision over the State expenditure, in the interests of British Imperialism. There have been occasions when he has forced the withdrawal of democratic concessions made by the Prince to the people.

Their relative importance and their dignity are measured by the number of guns fired to salute them wherever they go. It is the Viceroy's invidious task to decide how many guns are sufficient for the prestige of each feudal chieftain.

The role played by the people who live in the States is a comparatively simple one. They have to pay for the upkeep of the

Prince, his toy army, his stables and his extensive family. Thus, in Hyderabad, the Ruler, his offspring and their Royal Army cost the people £1 ½ million every year, leaving only £225,000 for essential health services; or, in the petty State of Rajkot, **the Royal stables and paddock alone cost the people more than education.**

The State of Mysore goes through the outward motions of having a legislative assembly. But the Assembly has no powers whatsoever except those of criticism.

In Hyderabad the Legislative Council of 21 has only six non-official members and it only meets four or five days in the year.

In the other states there are no such democratic forms.

The condition of education and health in the States is utterly deplorable. In Hyderabad, for instance, there are six High Schools and two colleges for a population of nearly 1 ½ million.

In order to prevent any criticism of this state of affairs, the Princes arrogate to themselves the most drastic powers of censorship and suppression of free speech. But it is not enough for them to suppress criticism within their own territories; they have enlisted the help of the Viceroy, and there are two British India Acts which prohibit, *even in British India*, the publication of newspapers or books, or the calling of meetings, which might tend to bring an Indian Prince into "hatred or contempt" or to "excite disaffection" towards the established administration in a state.

Princes and Congress

The Princes, we have seen, are an important and well nourished "minority." Their autocratic rule has the patronage and support of the Viceroy and his Political Staff. British troops are always available to quell "disturbances" in the States.

But if there is unity of reaction on the one side, there is a growing unity on the other side between the people of the States and the progressive forces in British India—that is, the Indian National Congress. This growing unity can only result, in the long run, in the complete breaking up of these parasitic feudal survivals which act as a brake upon the social and economic development of India as a whole.

The Federal Constitution of 1935 is constructed by British Imperialism and the precise object of checking this unity of progressive forces and of using the Princes as a reactionary bloc against the Congress.

A typical example of the conditions against which the people are revolting and the measures used to crush their revolt comes from the small State of Dhenkanal:

"The people of this State demanded the abolition of certain feudal levies and of forced labour on behalf of the Ruler, at

the end of 1939. A meeting was dispersed with an elephant charge and firing. Four people were killed.

"On October 10, 1938, the State police went to a village and demanded a boat to enable them to cross the river. The boatman refused. Fire was opened and four people were killed on the spot. British troops were rushed to Dhenkanal. Thousands of peasants crossed into British territory with their families and cattle."

These things speak for themselves.

Although there is at present no formal organisational link between the Congress and the States Peoples Movement, Congress leaders, such as Nehru and Patel, have openly associated themselves with the movement; and the movement itself has adopted the Congress flag and the Congress programme.

VII. The Indian Student and Education

"Only 26 per cent of the boys and 13 per cent of the girls who enter a primary school attain the standard at which permanent literacy is to be expected." (From "Education in India, 1934-5.")

Ninety-two per cent of the Indian people are illiterate.

Not only are the facilities for education in India utterly deplorable—two-thirds of India's villages have no schools—but where they do exist the teaching is so inadequate that three-quarters of the children going to school never attain literacy.

Only 56 per cent of the teachers, whether in primary or secondary schools, have had any training whatsoever. Their pay is so low—often only 5/- a week—that able men and women prefer to remain unemployed. A headmaster may get the princely sum of 10/- a week.

British Imperialism, with its fraudulent pretence of "good government," has criminally neglected this vital question of Education. The amount spent on it in India, including contributions from local authorities, amounts to a mere 9½d. per capita, as compared with £11 15s. 6d. spent on it in England.

For Higher Education there is one college for every 10½ million of the population. The outstanding feature of education in the High Schools and Colleges is its extreme lopsidedness. Literary education—the literature of England, of course, not of India—predominates over everything else, and scientific education is almost unobtainable. Text books are antiquated and carefully censored to present a rosy picture of imperialism and the capitalist system. Historical facts are presented in such a manner as to bring out the virtues of British administration and to belittle India's national culture.

But this attempt by the authorities to preserve the student from dangerous knowledge has failed to suppress his nationalism and his revolt against authority.

As a result, there has developed in India a strong and intensely nationalist student movement, taking an open and active part in the political struggle against British Imperialism, and defying the right of the university authorities to restrict its freedom of speech or its political activities.

At every stage of the struggle of the Indian National Congress against the British Government the students have played a big part. They have been arrested and imprisoned by the thousand.

Like the workers and peasants, the students have their own organisation, the All-India Students' Federation, which, cutting across communal divisions, draws its 100,000 members from all sections of the student community. In its three years of existence—for previous student organisations were suppressed by the Government during the civil disobedience campaigns of 1930 and 1932—it has fought for the interests of the students through strikes and demonstrations, through organised action, and has given its support to the Congress in its fight for national independence.

The Indian students are on the side of national liberation and of progress. They possess with the students of Britain common ideals of democracy and common interests. Their education, their culture, their prospects of useful employment, like those of British students, are frustrated by the common enemy—Imperialism.

VIII. What is the Indian National Congress?

"For more than fifty years the Indian National Congress has laboured for the freedom of India, and ever, as its strength grew and it came to represent more and more the nationalist urge of the Indian people and their desire to put an end to British Imperialism, it came into conflict with the ruling power. (Election Manifesto adopted by the All-India Congress Committee at Bombay on August 22, 1936.)"

So far, we have noticed, on the one hand, various minority interests—princes, landlords, bankers and millowners—opposed to the Indian National Congress. In this opposition they are serving not only their own minority interests but also the interests of the British Imperialism.

On the other hand we have seen how the Indian workers, and peasants, the people in the States and the students, are struggling for their various demands which bring them into conflict with these minority interests and, at the same time, link them up with the struggle of the Indian National Congress itself. That these broad strata of Indian society should, in their fight, become united in their

support of the Congress, naturally raises the question—How far does the Indian National Congress represent the aspirations and demands of the Indian people? Is the Congress justified in regarding itself as the voice of the workers and the peasants, of the States people and the students?

To-day the Congress has over five million individual paying members. Before their resignation in protest against the Viceroy's statement, Congress Ministries held office in all but three of the Indian Provinces.

The Congress is essentially a political organisation. It rejects all communal tendencies or religious prejudices. The charge thrown against it by British Imperialism, that it is a Hindu organisation with a religious bias, has no foundation. In point of fact large numbers of Moslems and members of other communities belong to it, and many of them hold important executive posts.

Their programme, too, is entirely non-sectarian. It is a political programme, which wins support and arouses opposition *on political not on religious grounds*. While, for instance, the Hindu communal organisation known as the Hindu Mahasabha opposes its radical non-sectarian programme, many Moslems give it their support for that very reason.

Congress in the Beginning

The Indian National Congress was founded in 1885 by an English official.

The history of the Congress is a story of development from a small middle-class group to a really representative popular movement, supported by the Indian people and voicing their demands.

In its early days, between 1885 and 1915, the Congress put forward 56 demands in the form of resolutions or petitions. None of these demands specifically concerned the workers, and only four were of immediate interest to the peasantry. The early struggle of the Congress was almost entirely directed towards the opening of government services to the educated Indians and the modification of the restrictions on the growth of Indian commerce. At Surat in 1907 the demand for self-government within the Empire was advanced for the first time.

But the opposition to the partition of Bengal and the Great War gave birth to new forces. National consciousness was awakening at last; discontent was evident on all sides; the working class and the peasantry began to find their own voices and to initiate independent action. Reflecting this general mass unrest the Congress for the first time began to develop as a mass movement.

The Struggle Begins

In 1919, at the conclusion of the War, in order to make some show of keeping to their promises of 1911 and 1914 (that India would have self-government), the British Government introduced the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms. These granted a few illusory political concessions.

But this was not enough to satisfy the growing discontent of the masses. Between 1919 and 1922 the national struggle in India was carried forward on a wave of mass struggle; millions took part in the great demonstrations and strikes.

Terror

The struggling people of India were met with terror—with lathi charges, bullets, prison, machine guns. In April 1919, at Amritsar, a big demonstration of peaceful unarmed men, women and children was fired upon by troops at the orders of the British Military Authorities. This cold-blooded massacre continued for ten minutes, 1,650 rounds of ammunition being fired. Nearly 400 people lost their lives, and more than a thousand were wounded.

At the same time, at Ahmedabad, 28 unarmed Indians were killed and 125 were wounded. At Lahore a crowd of 6,000 were fired on, and the terror extended also to the villages. Armoured trains pulled up and fired machine guns into villages and among crowds. Bombs and machine guns were used from aeroplanes, and one airman bombed the Khalsa High School.

This reign of terror failed completely to suppress the nationalist movement. Instead, it intensified the demand for freedom and broadened the basis of the party leading that struggle.

Independence

The Congress manifesto of 1920, issued against this background of economic distress and police terrorism, marks a great step forward in the development of the movement. The object of "*Swaraj*" (self-rule) is defined as complete independence. At the same time the manifesto puts forward for the first time a detailed programme for the improvement of the living conditions of the workers and the peasants.

For the first time it is made absolutely clear that "independence" is neither an abstract conception nor a negative absence of outside interference, but a positive and necessary condition for the social advancement and economic improvement of the masses.

From this stand the Congress, in spite of difficulties and periods of dissension, has never turned back. The more acute the struggle with imperialism has become, the more inevitably wide masses of the peasantry have been drawn into the active struggle of civil

disobedience and no-rent campaigns. But they have not been drawn in simply for an abstract fight against imperialism. They have been drawn into the active struggle of civil disobedience and no-rent campaigns. But they have not been drawn in simply for an abstract fight against imperialism. They have been drawn in for the winning of their immediate bread and butter demands.

These demands have in turn become the stuff and substance of the Congress programme and, under the test of experience, have proved to be far more fundamentally irreconcilable with the rule of British imperialism than the original middle-class demands of the early Congress ever were.

The middle-class demand for self-government within the Empire gives way to a movement of the entire people for complete independence.

Civil Disobedience*

In February 1922, on the occasion of the visit of the Prince of Wales to India, Gandhi launched a civil disobedience campaign in reply to Government repression. By July, 25,000 Indians were in jail on vague charges of "sedition" or "disaffection."

Meanwhile the working class was strengthening its organisation and preparing for independent working-class action. As a result of these struggles and of the growing nationalist movement, the Simon Commission was sent out to India in 1928. It was a commission entirely composed of Englishmen entrusted with preparing a new constitution for India. It was met with unconcealed hostility. In Bombay, Madras, Calcutta and other towns, demonstrations and strikes were the order of the day, and armed police troops and armoured cars were used to put down the populace.

The strength of the growing revolutionary movement in India was shown unmistakably at the Lahore Congress in December 1929. Thousands of workers, roused by revolutionary enthusiasm, stormed the platform, demanding complete independence for India and the commencement of a campaign to secure that aim. The campaign was begun on April 6, 1930. Strikes, riots and peasant risings took place throughout India. Crowds numbering tens of thousands attended the National flag salutation ceremonies, and were beaten up and fired on by the police.

The upsurge reached its highest point in Peshawar, the centre of the North-West Frontier Province, where huge mass demonstrations were held in the middle of April. Troops were called in, an armoured car was burnt, and the soldiers fired on the crowd.

**Civil Disobedience* is the Congress method of struggle. It consists in absolutely non-violent resistance to official orders, disobedience to emergency legislation, and refusal to co-operate with the Administration by non-payment of taxes, etc.

killing 65 and wounding 150. The most significant incident in the rising was the refusal of two platoons of a crack Hindu regiment, the 18th Royal Garhwali Rifles, to fire on a Moslem crowd. Instead, they fraternised with the demonstrators, and some actually handed over their rifles. The troops had to be withdrawn.

The Peshawar uprising was accompanied by a general uprising throughout the North-West Province. The mass movement was met by the most savage repressive measures. Troops, aeroplanes, tanks, guns and ammunition were sent to India. Non-political prisoners were released before their sentences were up to make room for political prisoners. By the end of the year the number of prisoners had increased to 54,000. Government by ordinance went on apace. By July 1930, 67 Nationalist newspapers and 55 printing presses had been shut down under the Press Ordinance.

Civil Disobedience Called Off

In 1933 mass civil disobedience was called off. One stage of the national struggle had ended.

In spite of mass arrests, police terror and military operations, the gains had been immense—not in the sense of practical concessions made by imperialism, but in the discovery of the amazing unity and awakening of the whole Indian people giving new impetus and new hope to the struggle for national independence.

IX. Independence and the New Constitution

"The poverty-stricken masses are to-day in the grip of an even more abject poverty and destitution, and this growing disease urgently and insistently demands a radical remedy. Poverty and unemployment have long been the lot of our peasantry and industrial workers; to-day they cover and crush other classes also—the artisan, the trader, the small merchant, the middle-class intelligentsia. For the vast millions of our countrymen the problem of achieving national independence has become an urgent one, for only independence can give us the power to solve our economic and social problems and end the exploitation of our masses." (Election Manifesto, adopted by the All-India Congress Committee at Bombay on August 22, 1936.)

The great problem which faces the Indian people to-day is how to meet the urgent demands of the workers, the peasants and the unemployed middle class. The general poverty, the disintegration of rural economy and the unproductive drain on national resources made by the payment of heavy interest and national debt charges, create a situation which demands radical changes and a plan of national reconstruction, if complete breakdown is to be avoided.

In the General Election of 1937, the Congress put before the people a detailed programme of social and economic measures. But, at the same time, they made it perfectly clear that there was little hope of carrying these through within the framework of the undemocratic Constitution of 1935, which the British Government had imposed upon them. Within the narrow limits of the franchise—30 million voters out of 350 million—the election was a plebiscite for or against this Constitution.

In six out of eleven provinces the Congress won huge majorities. In three others it was the largest single party, and in two of these was able to form a government. **The plebiscite had rejected the Constitution.**

But once in office, the Congress found, as it had warned the Indian people, that its radical labour and agrarian programme was checked and thwarted at every turn by constitutional checks, financial safeguards, and the power of which it held only a shadow in its hands. No one, least of all the Congress leaders, is under the illusion that 2½ years of Congress rule has radically altered the face of India. They never thought that this was possible.

The reactionary opponents of the Congress and of Indian independence like to point with scorn to the fact that Congress rule has produced no miracle, though in effect it has done more for India than any other Ministry before it. But the Indian people do not point with scorn. The Indian people knew what they could expect under the existing Constitution. In the recent municipal elections the Congress candidates have continued to sweep the board. Loyalty to the Congress has grown stronger and stronger.

The Constitution of 1935

The Act which came into force in 1935 was not framed by the Indian people. It was drafted in Whitehall and passed in Westminster by representatives not of Indian, but of British constituencies. The Indian people were only consulted in so far as the Viceroy selected individuals from various groups and interests in India, to attend the Round Table Conferences in a consultative capacity.

All parties in India condemned the constitution arbitrarily imposed on India by the British Parliament.

The Constitution is divided into two parts—provincial “autonomy,” and the Federal scheme for the Centre. The latter, owing to fierce opposition from the Indian people, has never been put into force and the Central Government is still carried on as before the “Reforms.”

The criticism made of the 1935 Constitution by Indian political opinion can be briefly summarised as follows:—

In the Provinces

1. The property and literacy qualifications for the franchise are such as to exclude all but 30 millions of the 270 millions in British India.

2. It is undemocratic to give special representation to commercial interests, British industry, landlords and other vested interests. In Bengal, for instance, the European group has 26 seats.

3. The Governor has special powers to disallow Bills or to declare that a Bill affects his "special responsibility" for maintaining law and order.

4. The Governor has the right to assume powers "at his discretion" to suspend the operation of the Act and to pass Ordinances.

Clearly this part of the Act was as much a mockery of autonomy as it was of democracy. At any moment British Imperialism could, within the framework of this Constitution, assume the mantle of open despotism.

That, in fact, was exactly what happened with the outbreak of the present war. Supplementary legislation was passed in Westminster which curtailed still further the powers of the responsible provincial Ministries, which interfered with their control over the State apparatus and gave the Governors special executive powers. The control of the police and the responsibility for Law and Order have passed almost completely into the hands of the bureaucracy.

Federal Scheme

1. In the two Chambers of the Centre, the Indian Princes, whose territories contain some 25 per cent of the population of India, are given far greater representation than is justified. Not only are they given this unfair weight, but their representatives are nominated and not democratically elected by the people.

Upper Chamber—Princes : 104 British India : 150

Lower Chamber—Princes : 125 British India : 250

2. The representatives from British India are not elected democratically, but indirectly and on a communal basis: that is, there will be electoral colleges for Hindus, Moslems, Sikhs, Christians, Europeans, Anglo-Indians and Depressed Classes. In this way the growth of real political parties, fighting for the economic needs of real social classes, is obstructed and the usual imperialist attempt is made to divert the major political and economic issues into a tussle between religious communities.

3. As in the provinces, special seats are reserved for landlords and vested interests.

4. The Constitution does not place in the hands of the

Chambers the control of Defence, Foreign Affairs, Banking or Railways (the British shareholders of which are guaranteed their fixed 5 per cent dividend by the Government).

5. Only 20 per cent of the national budget is under the control of the two Houses. The remaining 80 per cent is non-votable. Even in respect of the 20 per cent the Viceroy has the right to override any decision.

6. The Viceroy can disallow any Bill, prohibit discussion of any Bill or promulgate Ordinances.

7. The Princes are allowed to define what kind of legislation, passed by the Central Government, shall or shall not be valid within their States.

8. Finally, there are the Viceroy's special powers to preserve Law and Order, to safeguard financial interests, and to prevent minorities (such as the Princes and landlords from being "oppressed" by the majority).

Is it possible, within the framework of this imperialist contraption, for Indian democracy to develop? Is it possible for the crying demands of the Indian people to be met, when legislative power is placed in an assembly which is packed with reactionary vested interests, which has only limited control over finance, and which is liable to despotic interference by the Viceroy?

The Indian people think not. They want a constitution which will allow the growth of democratic forces and give vocal expression and representation to the people. **They want, quite simply, a democratic government which will enable them to get on with the job of attending to their social problems.**

They are convinced, from their experience of the Constitutions of 1919 and 1935, that they cannot get such democracy unless they frame their own Constitution. That is why they demand independence.

There is nothing abstract about this demand. National prestige has nothing to do with it. It is based on the simple and practical necessity of getting the means to attend to all the problems created, and the misery left unattended, by imperial exploitation. And it is precisely because the Congress has become a vast movement of the people and reflecting their demands, that this question of Independence and of a Constituent Assembly to frame her own Constitution has become the immediate and urgent issue. There is no more scope to-day for tinkering about half-heartedly within the present bogus Constitution, with the British bureaucracy still controlling the purse-strings and the police.

And as for the Princes, landlords and other vested interests—the time has come when India can no longer be a paradise for feudal survivals and privileged investors. To-day these classes must either

reconcile themselves to the democratic self-determination of India, or they must go!

Dominion Status

The British Government has frequently made specious promises to grant Dominion Status to India. Britain did this in 1917, and the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms followed. She did it in 1929, and after six years' painful gestation the Constitution of 1935 was born. To-day she reaffirms that pledge.

Are the Indian people to be blamed if they reject this re-affirmation in 1939 as an indication that "there will be no democracy for India if Britain can prevent it"? They are entitled to ask what is meant by Dominion Status if the course towards it involve such curious steps as the 1935 Constitution, which negate the whole idea of freedom and democracy, perpetuate the power of the princely order, and make it impossible either for the people's voice to be heard, or for Congress to carry out its programme of social reform.

The Indians believe, with some justification, that this Dominion Status, ever present and undefined upon the lips of British statesmen, is a fraud. Either it *is* or it *is not* independence. If it is not independence, then it is a device, along the lines of previous Constitutions, to give the shadow of democracy without that control over the State apparatus which alone can provide the substance.

The issue is clear. Democracy or the rule of foreign finance capital. Not both. And the Indian people will be guided in all their action by the deep conviction, based on bitter experience, that however beautiful the words in which it proposes to dress itself—"Dominion Status" or "Self-government," according to the latest fashion—the rule of British finance capital can give to India neither political nor economic freedom.

To pretend that these irreconcilables can be brought together by the vague and plausible concept of Dominion Status is an attempt to deceive the people.

X. What is Imperialism ?

"We did not conquer India for the benefit of the Indians. ...We conquered it by the sword and by the sword we shall hold it . . . We hold it as the finest outlet for British goods in general and for Lancashire cotton goods in particular." (The late Lord Brentford.)

The British went to India for profit, and for profit they stay there.

But the Indians have not profited. The average income per head of the Indian people—and there are 353 million of them in the Indian Empire—is £3 per annum; and even this figure is calculated after taking into consideration the wealth of millionaires like the Aga Khan, the notorious Mr. "A," and other Indian royalty who live in England on the proceeds of their "state revenue."

With an annual income of less than £3, the fate of the Indian agriculturist, who forms 70 per cent of the population, can easily be imagined. **He dies, unless he is more than average lucky, before the age of 25.** Even if he lives he is an emaciated and undernourished skeleton. He is illiterate.

What, then, has imperialism meant for the imperialists? What have the British got out of it? What is the function of this vast and unnecessary poverty? Who gains from the continued existence of a huge population so poor and miserable as this?

It is a paradox of the capitalist system that it is no more able to function by increasing the purchasing power of the Indian people than it is able to surmount its periodic crises in Europe and America by paying higher wages.

In a rational society, a country of 350 millions would provide an enormous and ever increasing market for consumption goods. In the U.S.S.R. the ever present and urgent problem has been how to satisfy the new wants of a people who were once, not long ago, as backward and poverty-stricken as the Indian people. But capitalism, in its frantic search for quick and easy profits, does not work that way. If the people are too poor to buy, it finds other ways of extracting the wealth of their country.

£500 million of British capital are invested in India. At a moderate estimate this brings in an annual income of £30 million. In addition, there is interest on the huge national debt of India which was incurred in the conduct of British wars of imperialist conquest and as India's contribution to the First World War.

Indian Railways

Particularly interesting is the history of the investment of British capital in the Indian railways. The profit from these vast undertakings was guaranteed by the British Government—out of Indian revenue, of course. Naturally, therefore, the British railway engineers had not the slightest interest in economy. It was planned to cover India with railways at £8,000 a mile; but by 1868 those in operation had cost £18,000 a mile.

In the House of Commons in 1872 Mr. William Massey, an ex-Finance Minister of the Viceroy's Council, spilt the beans . . . "All the money came from the English capitalist, and, so long as

he was guaranteed 5 per cent out of the revenue of India, it was immaterial to him whether the funds he lent were thrown into the river Hooghli or converted into bricks and mortar."

It is the Indian tax payer who has to subsidise these railways, which, because of their tremendous fixed charges, are run at a loss. And the Indian tax payer is in the last resort the Indian peasant and Indian worker. It is not surprising, then, that in spite of the alleged progress towards Dominion Status, the control of India's railways is reserved to a special Board under the Viceroy.

To take another example: In 1928 five jute mills in Bengal paid an average dividend of 125 per cent precisely at the moment when the employers took a decision to increase working hours from 54 hours per week to 60—on the same pay of 4/- a week! It should be obvious, therefore, why the jute employers form a precious "minority" who will side with the Viceroy against the popular forces which demanded, as part of the Congress programme, increased wages, shorter hours, and an increase of social legislation at the expense of those who take the profits.

£500 Million Against Democracy

The sacrosanctity of these £500 million of investments in India is incompatible with Indian democracy. Imperialism, from its very nature, must protect these investments. It must guard by force of arms its right to exploit the resources of the Indian people.

Unless it is possible to imagine the Federation of British Industries and the whole capitalist class committing economic suicide, it is fantastic to pretend that Imperialism can somehow reconcile Indian democracy, under the mystic slogan of Dominion Status, with the necessity of safeguarding the minority interests of capitalism in India.

For in the last resort democracy in India boils down to this: the refusal of the Indian taxpayer to subsidise British investments in Indian railways and the refusal of the Indian worker to labour 60 hours a week for 4/- in order to earn 125 per cent dividends for a foreigner.

It would be possible to give examples from the whole range of India's social picture to show how, at every turn, the claims of Imperialism—or of those, like the Princes, who have thrown in their lot with it—thwart the development of Indian society and cut across the obvious interests of almost all classes of the Indian people.

But no people will suffer indefinitely the stifling of their national life. There are limits to the extent to which the workers and peasants can be made to suffer. When the spirit of revolt against Imperialism matures, as it has matured in India, the fundamental incompatibility between Imperialism and democracy becomes clear.

The cracks and fissures in the fraudulent democracy of the existing Constitution begin to widen; and through these cracks and fissures the people can see only the figure of Dominion Status, armed with extensive financial safeguards, plausibly worded reserve powers, and a whole battery of Emergency Powers and Special Ordinances.

Imperialism and the British Workers

But it is not only the colonial peoples of the Empire who suffer under Imperialism. The British working class is no less certainly sacrificed.

In the first place, Imperialism sets up against the worker at home the competition of the low-paid colonial worker. The unemployment among cotton workers in Lancashire is a good example of the effects of this.

In the second place, it represents the domination of big trusts and monopolies, where the power of the employers is concentrated into great units, and which make more difficult the struggle of the workers for better conditions.

And finally, and most disastrously, it leads to acute competition between the imperialist countries themselves for markets, raw materials and spheres of investment. Inevitably there comes a time when these countries have between them occupied the entire available space of the world. But this doesn't mean that the competition ceases. Instead, it becomes still more acute and leads, inevitably, to imperialist wars for which the "have" and the "have-not" powers are equally responsible, and from which the peoples of the world have nothing whatsoever to gain.

XI. The Challenge

In the previous sections of this pamphlet we have given, in cold, hard facts and figures, the story of the exploitation of the Indian people.

It is from this background of poverty, disease and suffering that the Indian National Congress, gathering up the strength and the will of the millions of India, has stepped forward to challenge the domination of Imperialism. Its voice is the voice of India. Its experience is the hunger and the agony of the Indian people. Its demands are those which alone can secure for them a decent condition of existence.

We like to talk, in our country, of freedom and democracy, of the dignity of man, of the right of every human being to live in liberty. We struggle desperately, and rightly, against the increasing encroachments upon our own democracy. Lately, too, we have begun to see that the right to vote means very little without the

right to eat, the right to live in an inhabitable house, the right to health, fresh air and civilised conditions of labour.

Shall we any longer tolerate the denial of these things to the people of India? It is *our* government, *our* representatives, who keep the grip of Imperialism clamped down upon the Indian people, who deliberately withhold from them the possibility of improving their condition of life. Can we tolerate this? Can we be proud that, after 180 years of British rule, 92 per cent of the Indian people are illiterate, that the average Indian dies at the age of 25?

We in this country have a simple choice to make. On the one side we see the forces of reaction. We see them fortified and nourished by the profits of Empire which they extort from the people of India. These are our enemies.

On the other side we see a people of 350 millions, fighting the oppression of Empire, victims in intenser form of just that exploitation which has brought poverty and war to generations of British workers. We see them fighting desperately for freedom and for social justice. We know that every advance they make is a smashing blow against our common enemy, reaction. These are our allies.

We have seen that in India the imperialist thrives on the policy of "Divide and Rule." Every exploiter, big or small, knows that the unity of his victims is fatal to his despotism.

Therefore in this crisis we must draw near to the people of India, despite the barrier of censorship with which Imperialism has tried to divide us since the war began. It is not enough to talk of the "Indian" cause: it is our cause too. Nor of the "Indian" problem: it is our problem.

To-day the Indian National Congress, in the name of the Indian people, has challenged the British Government to show good cause why India should be committed to this war against her will. The Congress once more demands the independence without which the Indian people cannot hope to rebuild their country in democracy and social justice. This is at once a challenge to our common enemy and to ourselves.

This people is our friend. It is treachery to talk of a just and democratic world unless this friend, as free and equal partner, is to share in it.

Are we fighting for that just and democratic world? Or are we fighting for the preservation and the increase of that imperialism which for generations has brought agony to the millions of India?

INDIA IS THE TEST TO-DAY !

Digital Folder Name	India's Demand For Freedom_Larence & Wishart Ltd_Undated
Collection	Jayanta Mukhopadhay
Title	India's Demand for Freedom
Date(s)	Undated
Creator(s)-Author(s)	
Creator(s)-Editor(s)	
Publisher(s)	Lawrence & Wishart Ltd
Place of Publication	London
No. of leaves	32
Dimension (LxBxW) [in c.m]	21.3 x 14 x 0.2
Languages of material	English
Creator(s) of digital copy	CMS
Catalogued by	CMS
Date(s) of the digital copy [dd.mm.yyyy]	14-03-14
Present storage location	Suchetana Chattopadhay
Softwares	A3 I Ball Click Scan, Scan Tailor 0.9.9.2